

Manzullo to lobby for manufacturing center

A progress report:

A few weeks ago, I wrote a story about the push to establish a manufacturing technology research and development center in Rockford.

Uncle Sam holds the key to unlock the project, a joint venture involving the Rockford Area Chamber of Commerce, Abilities Center, the city of Rockford, Rock Valley College, Northwestern University, Northern Illinois University, the University of Illinois, Alion Science and Technology and Rock River Valley manufacturers.

THE IDEA IS bold, even audacious: establish a center in Rockford where new manufacturing technologies can be explored, developed and put to money-making use in area factories and beyond. The project is moving for-



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ward rapidly:

■ Abilities Center has produced a 7.5-minute CD explaining the Rockford project to Congress, said Abilities Center Director Jon Lundin.

■ Three, detailed "white papers" also will be given to Congress, he said.

■ The Illinois Coalition, a not-for-profit group working to strengthen the state's science and technology economy, is promoting the Rockford project with defense industries such as Boeing and the

government's Rock Island Arsenal, Lundin said.

■ The city of Rockford has agreed to be the receiving agency for a portion of the federal funding, said Bryan Davis, who works for U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan.

"The mayor was very willing to take on that role," Davis said.

Here's how the funding requests stack up:

■ The project seeks \$7 million under the Pentagon's Future Combat Systems project. That request goes to the House Defense Appropriations subcommittee. FCS is a \$200 billion program to develop lightweight, fuel-efficient and highly technical fighting vehicles.

■ \$4 million is requested from the Army for a micro-manufacturing project.

■ \$2 million is sought from the Small Business Administration to assist small manufacturers and entrepreneurs.

"We'll probably also request economic development money from the Veterans Administration and the Department of Housing and Urban Development," Davis said.

The requests are for money in the federal 2003 budget, which takes effect Oct. 1.

THE LOBBYING effort will be fast and intense, Davis said. It also will involve congressmen other than Manzullo.

"Because we're partnering with so many people from several areas of Illinois, we can bring in other members of Congress who represent those areas," Davis said.

The support of U.S. House

Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, R-Yorkville, is crucial to the Rockford project's success. Hastert's district borders Manzullo's and includes NIU.

While the lobbying takes place in Washington, D.C., "We are exploring what we can do in Rockford, right now, to start implementing this venture with existing resources," Davis said.

They've even given the funding requests a gobbledygook name, something that seems to be a requirement of all government-funded projects:

"Rapid Optimization of Commercial Knowledge," or ROCK. Of course.

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